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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Wednesday, August 9, 1944

Subject: "How to Dry Corn" Information from distribution officials of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

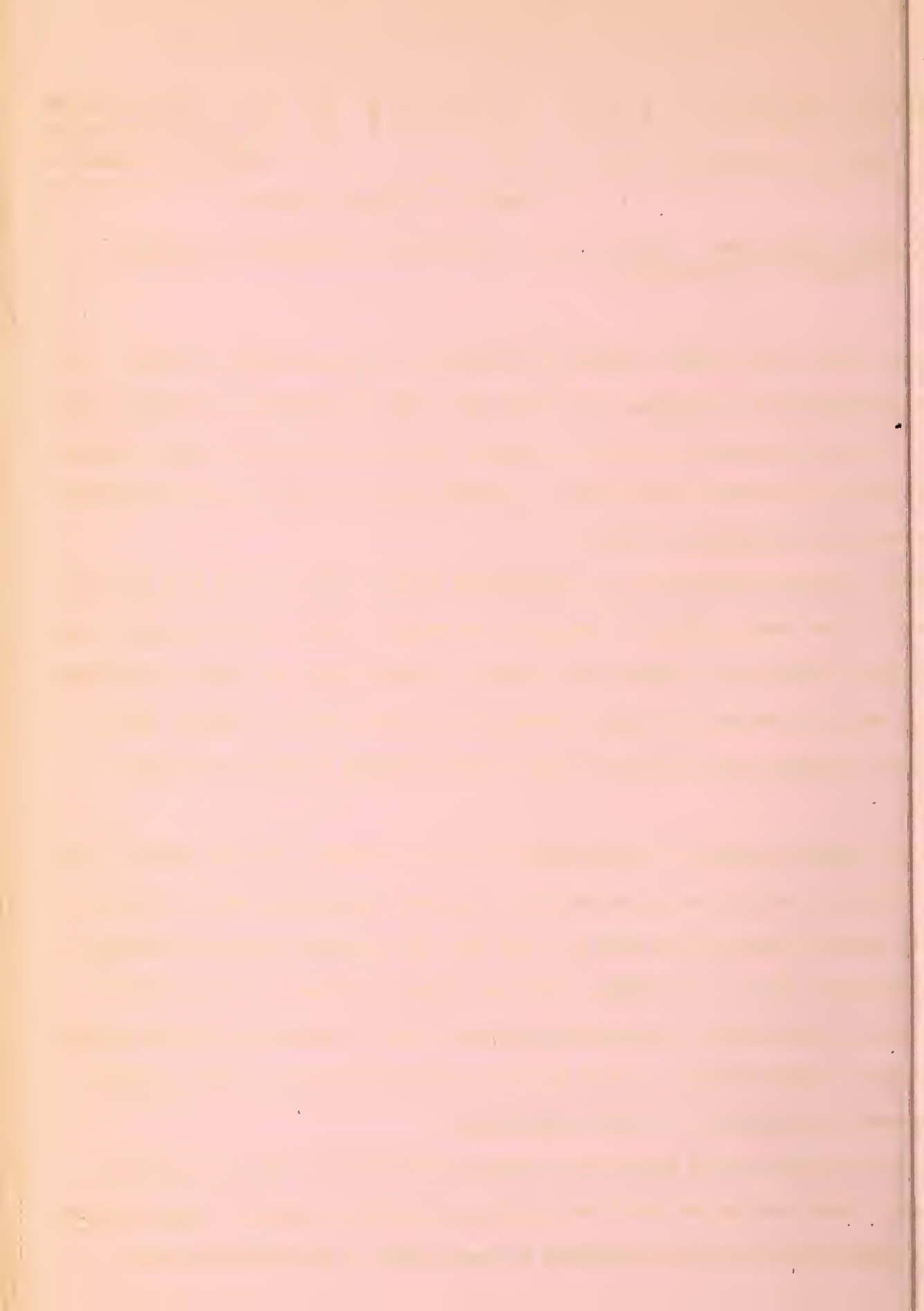
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Drying...one of the oldest methods for preserving corn...is still in vogue. It was first practiced by the Indians, who taught the early colonists this method of preserving their summer harvest for winter's eating. And in the opinion of many people, who think the flavor of dried corn can't be equaled, drying is still the best method for preserving this all-American food.

Perhaps you have memories of your grandmother drying a bit of corn in a pie tin on the back of the stove, during the roasting ear season. Then, when the summer was over, there was a big bag of dried corn already for winter use. If you've experienced this, then cooked dried corn is without doubt, one of your favorite dishes. And if you haven't, the sweet, nutty flavor of dried corn is almost certain to win your approval.

Today, science has added its contribution to this old art. And you can dry corn by controlled heat as well as by the warmth of the sun. And drying corn by controlled heat in an oven where you can keep the heat low, is generally much more satisfactory than nature's way of sun drying. That is, unless you live in a part of the country where you can count on sunny skies day after day. Even then, you have dust to contend with in outdoor drying. But no matter how you do the drying, the selection and preparation of the corn is of first importance.

Be sure to select, fresh tender ears in the milk stage, for the corn you are going to dry...the same as you would for cooking and immediate eating. Then, plan to use them right away, do not let them stand for any length of time before drying.



Next, husk the ears and remove all defects. You won't need to silk them, because the silks separate easily from the kernels after they are dried. Next, steam the ears for about 15 minutes, or until the milk is "set" in the kernels. Or if you can't arrange a kettle, with rack or colander, as a steamer, then boil the ears briskly in water for 7 to 8 minutes. Then cut the corn from the cobs and begin the drying immediately.

And here's the way to use your gas or electric oven in drying corn. While preparing the corn, get your oven ready. Warm it for 15 minutes. To do this, place the oven regulator at its lowest setting, unless you're using a gas oven, without a regulator. Then, turn the flame very low. Prop the door of a gas oven open during this warming-up process, but keep the door of an electric oven closed. By the time you finish cutting the corn from the cobs, your oven should be ready to begin the drying.

Now, spread the cooked corn, out from the cobs, on the trays. Do this evenly in a layer about a half-inch deep. And place the trays in the oven. You'll find that you can stack several trays together, by using wooden blocks at each corner to separate them so the air can circulate. If your gas oven floor has the corners cut out, then don't spread the corn over the corners of the tray else it will scorch.

The temperature of the oven is very important. Use a reliable thermometer, place it on the top tray, and keep the temperature at 150 degrees Fahrenheit. At no time should the oven get very hot. To let out moisture, keep the doors of an electric oven open about a half inch, that of a gas oven about 8 inches. But if you find that the temperature doesn't come down to 150 degrees Fahrenheit, open the doors still wider.

The drying usually can be accomplished in about 8 hours time. But during this time you'll need to keep careful watch over the corn to see that it dries evenly. Stir it, and shift the trays at regular half-hour intervals. The trays on the top and bottom dry fastest, so change them about and turn them from front to back. It's best to do this by the clock too. If you guess at the time, you may scorch the corn.



And here's a point to remember. Watch out for scorching near the end of the drying period.

Properly dried corn is hard, brittle and semi-transparent. To test it for dryness, strike it with a hammer. If it shatters, it's completely dried. But added warmth will not hurt it. So after testing a few grains, turn off the heat, open the door and let the corn stay in another hour.

As soon as you've removed the corn from the oven, sort it carefully before putting it in storage containers. One damp kernel can spoil an entire amount. If a number of kernels show signs of moisture, put them back and dry them a while longer. Use only small containers for storage, since dried foods are best if you use them soon after you open them. Make sure the containers are moisture proof, too. Air-tight screw top jars work very well, so do paraffined cartons or bags that can be sealed with a hot iron. It's a good plan to place these small containers in covered crocks or large covered lard cans. Keep them cool and dry and preferably where it's dark. Examine them occasionally. If you find signs of moisture, reheat the corn in the oven to 150 degrees Fahrenheit, then repack it in the containers. By the way, if you don't have trays for oven drying or aren't able to buy them, you can make your own. To make a tray, first construct a frame from soft lumber. Measure the inside width and length of your oven, and cut the four pieces of wood for the frame, 1-1/2 inches shorter than these measurements. Fasten them together with nails or corrugated fasteners. Then stretch string over the center, cover it with coarse cotton netting and tack both on the under side of the frame.

One to two ~~quarts~~ of dried corn will serve six persons. In preparing dried corn for serving, soak it first in cold water until the kernels are plump. But be careful not to soak it too long. Too much soaking will rob it of its sweet corn flavor and aroma. Then cook it until tender in the soaking water, and serve it as you would fresh or canned corn.

Besides getting our method for drying corn from the Indians, we obtained some of our present day ways of serving corn from the Indians too. For example, succotash, the favorite mixture of corn and beans, is borrowed from the Indians, name and all. It, like dried corn has been popular on American tables since colonial times.

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